

FEBRUARY - 1944

ONE SHILLING

THEATRE WORLD

This month: "While the Sun Shines" and "An Ideal Husband"



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THEATRE WORLD



Robert Donat

A delightfully informal study of Robert Donat, who, as famous film and stage star, has made theatrical history in taking over the lease of the Westminster Theatre where the first of his series of plays, *An Ideal Husband*, has met with outstanding success; so much so that it is difficult for Mr. Donat to formulate definite plans about his next production. It is almost certain, however, that this will be a new play.

Scenes from his distinguished revival of Oscar Wilde's comedy are featured in this issue.



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Edited by Frances Stephens

February, 1944

Over the Footlights

FOLLOWING the after-Christmas lull we can expect a busy and interesting season in the West End?

H. M. Tennent, Ltd., head the list with six new productions. Of these *The Cradle Song* and *The Druid's Rest* will have been produced by the time this issue is in print. Sierra's *The Cradle Song* is directed by John Gielgud and the cast at the Apollo includes Wendy Hiller, Frederick Leister, Muriel Aked, Lilly Kann, Yvonne Mitchell and Julian Dallas. Emlyn Williams's comedy *The Druid's Rest* which he is also producing, has, of course, already met with success during its provincial tour. Gladys Henson, Roddy Hughes and Michael Shepley are in the company. The other four plays, which should reach London during the next few weeks, are Eric Linklater's *Crisis in Heaven*, produced by John Gielgud, with a cast including Dorothy Dickson, Adele Dixon, Esmond Knight, Ernest Thesiger and Charles Goldner; Mr. Gielgud's production of *The Last of Summer*, adapted by John Perry from Kate O'Brien's novel of the same name, with Fay Compton in a leading role; Thomas Job's *Uncle Harry*, with Beatrix Lehmann and Michael Redgrave, and a new comedy by Robert Morley entitled *Staff Dance*. The latter will have a cast headed by the author, and Beatrice Lillie playing her first straight role in this country.

The two-and-a-half years' run of *Quiet Week-End* at Wyndham's was interrupted on January 29th to prepare for a tour for the Forces in the Middle East. Linnit and Dunfee and Norman Marshall in conjunction with Howard Wyndham and Bronson Albery are presenting a new play at Wyndham's entitled *A Soldier for Christmas* by Reginald Beckwith, who has already distinguished himself as a writer for West End revues. The play is a comedy of the social change-over, light and amusing in treatment, but with a serious undercurrent, and Joyce Barbour, Robert Beatty, Meriel

Forbes and Trevor Howard are among the leading members of the company.

Jack Buchanan has a busy programme for the spring, although he himself will continue to appear in *It's Time to Dance*. The first of the new plays he is presenting will be *A Murder for my Valentine*, a psychological thriller by Vernon Sylvaine, and another is *Through This Same Garden* by Beatrix Thomson and Frederick Carlton, a romantic play in which is unfolded the story of the life of a woman from childhood to middle age, and the influence she has over the lives of her family and its fortunes.

Eagerly awaited is the new Old Vic production of *Hamlet*, with Robert Helpmann as the Prince. This is scheduled to open at the New on Friday, February 11th, for an eight-week season. The other principals are Pamela Brown as Ophelia, Basil Sydney as Claudius, Margot Grahame as Gertrude, Lawrence Hanray as Polonius, Geoffrey Toone as Laertes, Dennis Price as Horatio, Gus McNaughton as the Grave-digger, Charles Hickman as Osric, and Charles Deane as the Ghost.

The production, devised by Michael Benthall and directed by Tyrone Guthrie, aims at obtaining the same effect of speed and dramatic excitement as that to which Elizabethan audiences were accustomed on the open apron stage, but aided by the resources of the modern theatre, and the minimum of cuts have been made. The set itself is a genuine Old Vic one, having been built of timber from the bombed theatre in the Waterloo Road. News that the set and the dresses have been designed by Leslie Hurry reminds us of his previous brilliant work for the theatre, notably and appropriately the décor for Helpmann's ballet *Hamlet*. F.S.

ARC DE TRIOMPHE

Ivor Novello's latest success, will be the subject of our main illustrated feature in the March issue.

Wherever smoking is permitted—ABDULLAS FOR CHOICE

New Shows of the Month

The Christmas Shows

IT has been good to have among us this season such old favourites of the children as *Peter Pan*, *Where the Rainbow Ends* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Of these *Alice* in a delightful new version by Clemence Dane, made a deep impression, recalling childhood days when it was easy enough to daydream like Alice herself and conjure well beloved characters from the pages to strut before our young eyes. Lewis Carroll's immortal books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass* have been transplanted at the Scala with a rare naturalness against backgrounds and costumes which are Tenniel brought to life. Roma Beaumont, scarcely off the stage for a moment, is an ideal Alice and not for a long time shall we forget Dame Sybil Thorndike's sublime inanity as the White Queen, nor the relish with which she "took to the wires" for her airborne exits and entrances. Space does not allow mention of the rest of the long cast, but they are all there, the White Rabbit, the Duchess, the March Hare, Gryphon, Mock Turtle, Red Queen, Tweedledum, Humpty Dumpty, the White Knight and all the other old friends. You will never regret renewing their acquaintance.

Humpty Dumpty is the best of the Coliseum pantomimes for many a year. High spot is Nervo and Knox's skit on

"*Peter Pan*"—Cambridge, December 22nd.

"*Humpty Dumpty*"—Coliseum, December 23rd.

"*Alice in Wonderland*"—Scala, December 24th.

"*While the Sun Shines*"—Globe, December 24th. (See pages 9-17.)

"*Cinderella*"—His Majesty's, December 27th.

"*Where the Rainbow Ends*"—Winter Garden, December 27th.

"*Don Abel Wrote a Tragedy*"—Arts, January 13th.

Romeo and Juliet, itself worth the visit. Naughton and Gold, Pat Kirkwood and Norma Dawn add further humour and charm to this lavish production with its fourteen scenes.

Cinderella at His Majesty's is a worthy successor to last year's *Jack and Jill*, with Evelyn Laye and Carole Lynne as a lovely fairy-tale pair.

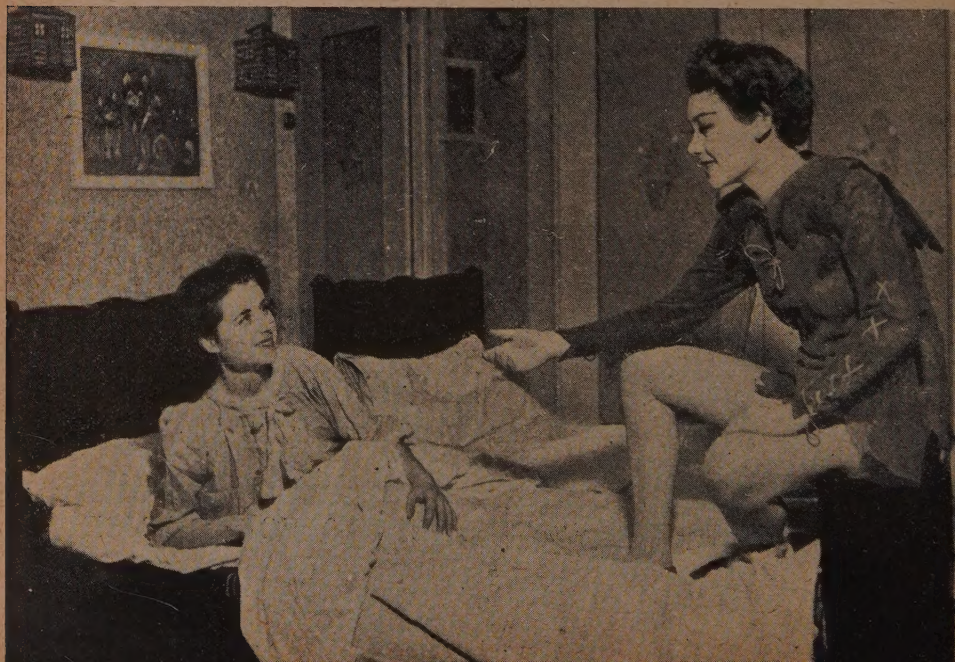
F.S.

"Don Abel Wrote a Tragedy"

THERE is a scene in an American comedy that still draws the town after a year's playing, where a New York policeman seizes the most incongruous moment to explain to an influential dramatic critic the virtues of

(Continued on page 8)

(Below): A scene from Act I of Jack Hylton's production of *Peter Pan* at the Cambridge. Peter Pan (Glynis Johns) flies into the Darling nursery in search of his shadow, to the surprise and delight of Wendy (Diana Deare).

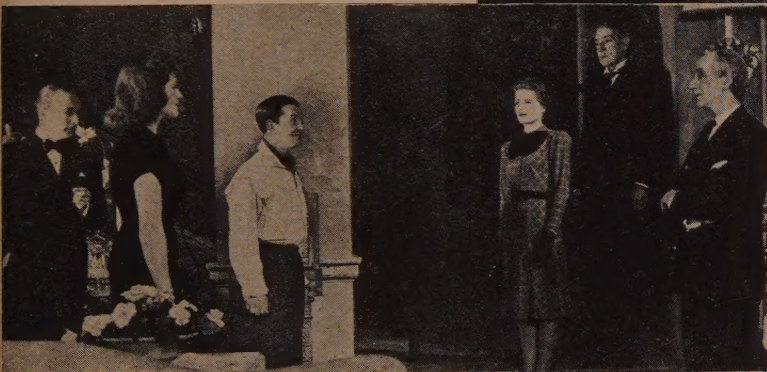


“Halfway to Heaven”

Scenes from the delightful play by Harry Segall, presented by Firth Shephard at the Princes Theatre, in which Bobby Howes and Sydney Howard (right) give outstanding performances.



(Below): Bobby Howes as Joe Pendleton, a cheery little boxer, who, following an accident, was snatched prematurely out of his body by an over-conscientious Heavenly Messenger, is in search of a new body, aided by the heavenly Mr. Jordan. He arrives at the Farnsworth mansion, where, invisible to the inmates, he decides after looking into things to take over the body of the master of the house, who has just met an untimely end. (Left to right): Leslie Perrins as Tony Abbott, Betty Stockfield as Julia Farnsworth, Bobby Howes as Joe, Lesley Brook as Betty Logan, H. R. Hignett as Ames, the butler, and J. H. Roberts as Mr. Jordan.



(Below left): Joe, now Mr. Farnsworth, has at last persuaded Sam Parkin, his trainer, of his identity, but finds himself glued to the floor when he tries to go against Mr. Jordan's instructions. (Below): Joe who has now stepped into the body of Murdock, a famous boxer, finds happiness at last with the aid of the benign Mr. Jordan.

PICTURES

BY

JOHN VICKERS.





Jack Hylton has provided another lavish pantomime in *Cinderella* at His Majesty's. (Above left): Burton Broom, Ugly Sister; Evelyn-Laye, Prince Charming; and Sid Plummer, Ugly Sister, in one of the many hilarious scenes. (Right): Natasha Sokolova, who appears as the Fairy Godmother, is, of course, the young Anglo-Russian dancer who has already gained a reputation for her charming dancing during the past few years.

a play he has written. In a very few minutes the whole tribe of amateur playwrights, bane of several worlds, are laughed into proportion.

A contrast is permissible because the Arts Theatre in January selected the same theme, but they occupy three hours to achieve much the same result. The play is the Granville-Barker translation of Quinteros' comedy, telling the story of a Spanish civil servant who writes a tragedy, loses his senses to the extent of throwing up his position to endure three years of the theatre's shams and insincerities, before achieving production, failure and disillusion.

An Edwardian sense of leisure prevails in Don Abel's theatrical adventure, and not the grace and wit in the dialogue, or some very sound acting by the company, can vanquish our feeling that swifter treatment

gives the policeman the advantage over the civil servant. That should not discourage the faithful from patronising the current Arts production, for there are some attractive moments. An anonymous gentleman wanders through the ever open door of the theatre, to claim acquaintance with all—he is true of all green rooms. The civil servants at work in Madrid show us generations of bureaucracy in all lands.

From a company very rich in men for these times John Ruddock's Don Abel, Edward Byrne's Don Maurice, and Elwyn Brook-Jones's Urrutia form the solid foundation, on which all is safely built. Grace Lane gives a pleasant and complete assurance to Dona Antonia, the famous actress, and Alexandra Mikellatos and Mary Dailey manage admirably the younger generation's share.

F.J.D.



(Right):

ROVI PAVINOFF
(star featured dancer)
who arranged the ballet
and is dancing as
"Jack Frost" in the
London Coliseum Pantomime,
Humpety Dumpty.

Portrait by

Alexander Bender.

(Left):

BETTY FRANKISS,
the original "vamp"
in *Me and My Girl* at
the Victoria Palace,
and, more recently, the
"Totem" girl in *Rose
Marie* at the Stoll, is
this season's "boy" in
Robinson Crusoe at
the Theatre Royal,
Birmingham, one of
the most popular pantomimes
in the provinces this year.



The young Earl of Harpenden, on leave from the Navy, entertains an American officer who had been celebrating too well the night before. The play opens in Lord Harpenden's Chambers in the Albany, and in this picture Lord Harpenden is seen telephoning Mabel Crum, one of his girl friends, in the hope that she will come along to entertain the American. Harpenden is getting married next day, but invites his new-found friend to make himself at home during his absence.

Hugh McDermott as Lieut. Wiseman and Michael Wilding as the Earl of Harpenden.



PICTURES

BY

JOHN VICKERS.

"While the Sun Shines"

AT THE GLOBE

● TERENCE RATTIGAN has the West End laughing all over again with his brilliant new comedy. Here is the same care-free spirit that made *French without Tears* the biggest hit in years and there is certainly never a dull moment from curtain rise to curtain fall. It was a happy idea to present members of the "United Nations" in so disarming a guise, and further proof of Mr. Rattigan's gift of characterisation is the way the three young men emerge as distinct and knowledgeable types. Michael Wilding, Hugh McDermott and Eugene Deckers are the English, American and French co-fighters, respectively, in more ways than one. Jane Baxter, as a charming but inexperienced W.A.A.F. of noble birth, is the cause of all the heart-burning, while Ronald Squire as her father, the impetuous Duke of Ayr and Stirling, hovers around with cheerful ineffectualness. Brenda Bruce lends colour to the proceedings as Mabel Crum, the good-hearted, amorous little typist, and the butler, Horton, is played with pre-war poise and dignity by Douglas Jefferies. The play is presented by H. M. Tennent, Ltd., and Linnit and Dunfee, Ltd. Anthony Asquith produces.



(Left):

Wiseman: Isn't it customary in the British Navy for a rating to stand up when an officer passes him?

Lieutenant Wiseman gets a surprise when he discovers that a real live Earl does not have to be an officer. He learns from his new-found friend that the powers do not apparently consider him the "officer type," and that the interview he is just about to keep at the Admiralty is certain to be abortive like all the rest. Meantime Horton (Douglas Jefferies), Harpenden's faithful manservant, gives his master a hand with his boots.



Horton: Yes, sir, we must be worth all of two million pounds, sir.

Horton unbends sufficiently to give the visitor some idea of the Harpenden standing—financial and otherwise—much to the delight of the exuberant young man from America, who is already deeply impressed by this first-hand glimpse of the English aristocracy.



The Earl's fiancée, Lady Elizabeth Randall (Jane Baxter), a charming young member of the W.A.A.F.s, calls early—unexpectedly after her night journey from Scotland. Among other things she announces to her fiancé that she has invited an officer of the French forces to spend his leave in the Albany. She had, it seems, spent a most illuminating time with him on the journey and begins to waver a little about the nature of her affection for the young Earl.



Elizabeth's father, the impecunious Duke of Ayr and Stirling (Ronald Squire), holds up his future son-in-law while he tries in vain to get credit from sundry sources on the 'phone, for a little flutter on the races.



The Duke I haven't been to Paris since the Duc de Cay won the Grand Prix.

Lieutenant Colbert (Eugene Deckers) arrives only to add to the confusion, in spite of the Duke's noble effort at polite conversation.

Colbert takes the first opportunity to strengthen his plea that Lady Elizabeth should not marry the Earl, explaining with true French realism how obvious it is she does not really love him.





(Left):

Wiseman: I've got a soft spot myself for babes who look like you.

The Lieutenant finds Elizabeth alone in the flat and most naturally takes her for the celebrated Mabel Crum, from the Air Ministry. To say he falls for her is to put it mildly, and not feeling the need for any preliminary introductions is soon behaving like a very old friend.

Wiseman: He didn't tell me you'd be in uniform. Gosh, that blue brings out the colour of your eyes.

Elizabeth is swept off her feet by this most attractive and persuasive young American, who certainly demonstrates Lieutenant Colbert's theory that to date she has known nothing about the art of falling in love.



The Duke is truly astounded when he finds his daughter, hitherto a most circumspect young lady, firmly asleep in the middle of the morning as a result of the drinks she had indulged in with Lieutenant Wiseman.

Later when the real Mabel Crum (Brenda Bruce) turns up, the American is decidedly unresponsive, his mind still full of the lovely Elizabeth. Harpenden returns, blissfully unaware of all that has happened, and successfully negotiates the delicate task of terminating his own association with the good-natured Mabel, in view of his impending marriage.

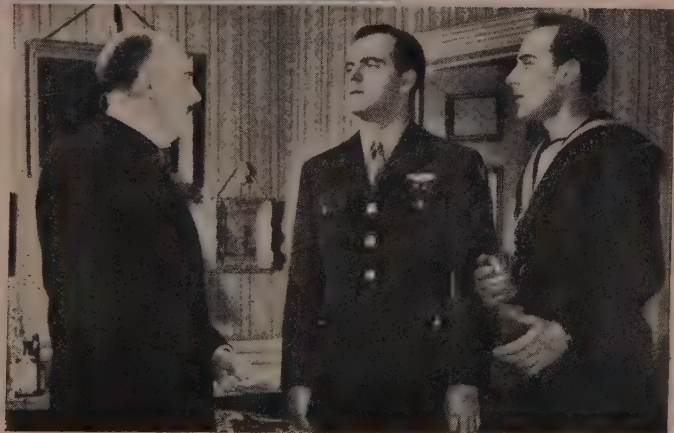


The Duke: Elizabeth says she is not going to marry you.

The Duke, decidedly depressed, comes with the news that his daughter most unaccountably does not want to marry Harpenden the next day.



The awful truth dawns that it was Harpenden's fiancée Lieutenant Wise's entertained that morning. The reason for Elizabeth's behaviour takes on a new light.





Harpenden: Darling, don't cry. I only want to know what's happened.

The Earl speaks to Elizabeth at her hotel, the American and the Frenchman both displaying a most unseemly proprietary right to her affections. Even as plegmatic a young Englishman as Harpenden begins to show signs of annoyance with the two unknown guests who have walked right in and snatched his fiancée from under his very nose.

The atmosphere grows tense as the evening wears on, and Harpenden has the humiliating experience of standing by while his two rivals fiercely contend which of them Elizabeth loves. The Frenchman insists he was the first on the scene, as indeed he was, and the two nearly come to blows.





Duke: You know, I haven't played craps for years.

Having settled nothing by argument the three young men resort to the dice to decide which of them shall go along to Elizabeth at her hotel. They are joined by the Duke who likes nothing better than a spot of gambling. The American wins.



Hours later and Lieut. Wiseman has not returned, much to the disgust of Harpenden and Colbert. The Duke, however, who is steadily winning hundreds of pounds from his erstwhile future son-in-law, seems blissfully unaware of the fate of his daughter.



Harpenden, driven to desperation by the continued non-appearance of Wiseman and Elizabeth, proposes to Mabel Crum, with Colbert as an interested onlooker. Mabel, a little reluctant to take advantage of the situation, nevertheless accepts.



(Left):

Wiseman: You're sure this is the way you want it?

Elizabeth: Yes, Joe, and so are you.

In the small hours Elizabeth and the American return, having decided that, attracted to each other though they are, Elizabeth is meant for Harpenden and Wiseman for Dulcie, his girl-friend back in the States.

(Below):

Duke: Mabs!

Mabel: All right. Don't tell me. I know. Back to the kitchen.

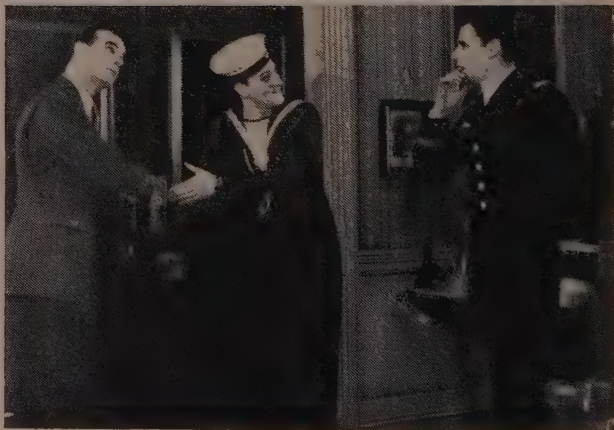
Mabel, who has spent most of the night in and out of the kitchen, causes general consternation when she appears in Harpenden's scarlet pyjamas.



Wiseman: Après vous, monsieur.

Colbert: Vive la France.

As they invite him to share Harpenden's bed with them for the remaining few hours of the night, it is obvious that the Englishman and the American are at least united in their antagonism to Colbert, who was the first to unsettle Elizabeth's mind.



bel: Well, there you are, Elizabeth. I'm throwing your back in your face. Do you still want him?

Next morning Mabel, with considerable magnanimity, renounces Harpenden and is sensible enough to realise that their marriage would not have been a success.



Mabel stages a little scene in which she tells Lord Harpenden that she is not going to marry him after all. His eager response to the news proves that he really loves Lady Elizabeth.



Freeman: We want to know who you're marrying?

Harpenden: Oh, didn't I tell you? Elizabeth.

Various last moments in the play. Harpenden is ready for his wedding and the curtain falls on yet another game of ups and downs as the American and Frenchman play for the job of best man.



Whispers from the Wings

BY
LOOKER ON



DAME IRENE VANBRUGH
as Lady Markby.

WHAT a privilege it is to talk to Dame Irene Vanbrugh, whose grace, poise and elegance are without equal. The other day in her dressing room at the Westminster I realised to the full her gift for conversation on the widest possible subjects. We discussed many things from the modes and manners of the nineties to the future of aviation in a world of incredible changes. It was sheer joy to listen to her beautiful voice and to observe the animation of her fine eyes and ready smile.

Doubly delightful, too, was it to discuss Robert Donat's distinguished revival of Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* with the great actress who created the part of the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax in the original production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Dame Irene, of course, knew Fanny Brough who created her present role, and she would have been at the first night of *An Ideal Husband*

at the Haymarket Theatre in 1895 if she had not been busily preparing for the first night of the Wilde masterpiece.

Dame Irene had nothing but praise for the Westminster production. "You see the play as originally intended," she said. "Not once is the audience tempted to smile, as at a museum piece, although one must admit parts of this play are far more dated than *The Importance*. I cannot, for instance, imagine that the relationship of a modern married couple could remotely resemble that of Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, and it says much for the acting that the audiences accept them in good faith." We fell to talking about Lady Markby, that charming prattler who "talks more and says less than anybody." "Now there's a character who is not dated. Lady Markby is one of the immortal ones, belonging to no particular age or fashion."

Together we recalled some of Dame Irene's famous parts. I liked her story about the time she played Mrs. Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Manchester. It was a very special production on a special ringed stage, but alas Mancunians failed to give the overwhelming support afforded the performing sea lions which took the bill on the following week.

Before I left I heard about the astounding coincidence of the John-Collier portrait of Lady Barnes, Dame Irene's sister, which, via a sale at Christies and a stage furnishing company, found its way on to the Westminster stage on the second day of the run. Imagine Dame Irene's surprise when during a long wait in the wings her eye fell on this late arrival! You can see the picture very clearly in the oval frame on page 21.

Green Room Rags

THE first of two 1944 all-"star" Green Room "Rags" will be held at the London Hippodrome on Sunday afternoon, February 20th, with R. H. Gillespie the "Chief Ragpicker."

Artists who had definitely promised to appear at the time of going to press were Fay Compton, Mary Ellis, Edith Evans, Sid Field, Lynn Fontanne, Peter Graves, Halama and Konarski, Beatrice Lillie, Alfred Lunt, Ivor Novello and Wendy Toye.

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HALF-TERM BEGINS FEBRUARY 21st.

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W. P. WADDINGTON, M.A. (Oxon.), Secretary.



Lady Markby (Dame Irene Vanbrugh): So kind of you to let me bring my friend Mrs. Cheveley. Two such charming women should know each other.

Lady Markby is the innocent cause of the blackmailing Mrs. Cheveley being introduced into the Chilterns' home. In the picture are Rosemary Scott as Lady Chiltern, Nan Hopkins and Rosamund Greenwood as the Countess of Basildon and Mrs. Marchmont (seated) and standing, Ian Lubbock as Vicomte de Nanjac. At the top of the page is another scene from the opening of the play showing Rex Whistler's lovely first act setting.

“An Ideal Husband” AT THE WESTMINSTER

THE first play of Robert Donat's new management has met with overwhelming success. Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* was a happy choice and the splendid cast and magnificent production make this a revival that no theatregoer can afford to miss. The story of the play is that of a rising politician, almost ruined on the eve of his greatest success by a blackmailing woman who holds the secret of his past life, and it is interesting to recall that *An Ideal Husband* is dedicated to Frank Harris—author of *The Life and Confessions of Oscar Wilde*. He claims in this book originally to have given Wilde the plot of the play. It appears that when Harris was at one time in Cairo, an American called Cope Whiteland told him of a rumour that Disraeli had asked the Rothschilds to buy him shares in the Suez Canal project before its official announcement. Harris gave no credence to the idea, but when he told Wilde about it later, it occurred to them both that it would make an excellent situation for a play. Wilde wrote the play in the summer of 1894, at Goring, at the same time writing *The Importance of Being Earnest* in three weeks.

PICTURES BY EDWARD MANDINIAN.



Lord Goring (Roland Culver): Don't mention to anyone that I have taken charge of this brooch.

Lord Goring makes a rather unusual request of Sir Robert's sister, Miss Mabel Chiltern (Peggy Bryan), when she finds one of the guests has left behind a diamond and ruby brooch.



Lady Chiltern: I feel to-night that I have saved you from something that might have been a danger to you.

Lady Chiltern, unaware of Mrs. Cheveley's power over her husband, insists that he write a letter to Mrs. Cheveley refusing to support the canal scheme she is interested in.

Sir Robert (Manning Whiteley): I felt I had fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

Sir Robert Chiltern explains his one big crime, that of selling a state secret, to Lord Goring.

Mabel: Good afternoon, Lord Goring. Pray be as trivial as you can.

The vivacious Miss Chiltern is more than a little in love with Lord Goring, though she has not succeeded in bringing him to the point of proposing.





Lady Markby: In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything and wonderfully interesting it was.

Lady Markby, charming as ever, calls again with Mrs. Cheveley (Martita Hunt), her amusing chatter covering most skilfully any suggestion of strain between Lady Chiltern and the woman seeking to influence her husband. (Standing behind table, John Vere and John Baker as Mason and James, the butler and footman.)



Mrs. Cheveley: Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike

Mrs. Cheveley tells Lady Chiltern about her husband.

(Below): Sir Robert orders Mrs. Cheveley to leave the house when he learns that she has divulged the secret of his past to his wife.





*Lord Goring: To love oneself
is the beginning of a life-long
romance, Phipps.*

Lord Goring, in the sitting room of his house in Curzon Street, expounds his philosophy to his faithful servant Phipps (Townsend Whittington). However, in contradiction, he is doing his utmost to help his friends, Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, who have become estranged.



*Lord Goring: I forbid you
enter that room.*

Later Sir Robert, distracted by recent unhappy events, calls on his friend. He hears a noise in the next room and suspects an eavesdropper. Much to the alarm of Lord Goring, who believes the hidden visitor to be Lady Chiltern herself, since she has announced her intention of calling on him for help and advice.



*Lord Goring: For so well
dressed a woman, Mrs. Cheveley,
you have moments of
admirable commonsense.*

It was Mrs. Cheveley who had called uninvited, armed with the trump card of the missing brooch, which she had in fact stolen from his sister years before. Lord Goring obtains and burns Robert Chiltern's incriminating letter.



Lord Goring: I only read "The Morning Post." All that one should know about modern life is where the Duchesses are.

Lord Caversham (Esme Percy) shows his son the "Times'" report of Sir Robert's brilliant speech attacking the canal scheme Mrs. Cheveley wanted him to support.

(Below):

Lord Goring: Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness.

Lord Goring gives the unbending Lady Chiltern a gentle lesson in the art of forgiveness, incidentally proving that she herself is not without fault in the matter.



Mabel: It is a public scandal the way I adore you.

Miss Mabel Chiltern is only too glad to be wooed and won when Lord Goring, the sophisticated and charming, proposes marriage to her, this happy occasion being also greatly to the liking of Lord Caversham, who had felt that his son greatly lacked stability.

(Below):

Lady Chiltern: For both of us a new life is beginning.

The danger of public scandal and private dissension averted through the good offices of their friend, Sir Robert and his beautiful wife face the future anew.



Hollywood War Worker

by

(Left):

UNA
O'CONNOR

Eric Johns



WHEN the curtain fell for the 405th time on the last act of *Cavalcade* at Drury Lane it fell for the last time. Apart from being the last night of Coward's great epic, the occasion was historic, though we failed to realise it at the time, in marking the last appearance on our stage of one of the supreme creative artists of our time—Una O'Connor.

When Galsworthy saw her play his "Mrs. Jones" in *The Silver Box*, and later when Noel Coward saw her play his "Ellen Bridges" in *Cavalcade*, they both groped for the same words. Both dramatists were faced with the rare experience of seeing the cold print of their lines warmed to life with such masterly insight that the result on the first night surpassed their wildest dreams. Here was an actress in the truest sense of the word—a woman who could efface her own striking personality and assume the characters she played with such conviction that in an instant any audience was prepared to melt into laughter or tears at her bidding.

Hollywood talent scouts did not need to have her pointed out to them. "We must have the little Irishwoman!" they cried at Drury Lane when they bought the film rights of *Cavalcade*; and thus in the same breath they snapped up a Noel Coward success, as well as a perfect performance of one of his most moving characterisations.

Hollywood was much richer for the documents that were signed under the roof of Old Drury that night, and better able to fill the gap caused by Marie Dressler's death two years later. Una's familiar shadow on the screen is still more vividly entertaining than the average star actress making a personal appearance on the stage; but our theatre has never been the

same since the Drury Lane curtain obliterated our last glimpse of her frail figure taking that last call more than ten years ago.

Una is still working in Hollywood, and lest anyone fondly imagines that she is lotus-eating with that band of decadent English stars supposed to be drinking Life's cup to the full in California while we are fighting the war for them in Europe, I repeat that Una is working, and let it be understood that working in wartime in Hollywood is not the bed-of-roses life popularly associated with stardom.

Like any hard-working London business woman Una rises at cock-crow, doing the chores in her spacious apartment on North Crescent Heights before leaving for an early call at the Studio. By tradition stars have a retinue of servants, but not in wartime Hollywood. A coloured help may condescend calling if you are prepared to pay an astronomical figure, and even then you have to meet her at the bus terminus and convey her to your apartment in your car. Una gets on with her own chores, refusing to cope with the fuss and favour, and preferring to save her precious petrol ration for the collection and delivery of her laundry.

Shopping is a nightmare, which also has to be faced when she can find time, either before or after her long day at the Studio. Californian shops are just as short of supplies as ours. Meat and butter are often rarities even for people with coupons; in fact, Una has not tasted real butter for months, as she prefers to spend her points on the meat ration. Chocolate and candy have been steadily disappearing from the shelves for some months. Tea, which means so much to the English Colony in Hollywood, is sold in dribbles of less than two ounces on those rare occasions when the shops have a supply.

The war has jolted film folk out of their comfortable existence in Hollywood, which is no longer a playground for the spoilt darlings of the public. 100,000 additional people have poured in during the past year, thereby putting so heavy a strain on both accommodation and supplies that people have been seen living in tents in some parts of Los Angeles. Life is no longer carefree; and even those stars boast-

(Continued on page 31)

"This Time it's Love" AT THE COMEDY

(Right):

Louche: Of course Florence is an adorable woman.

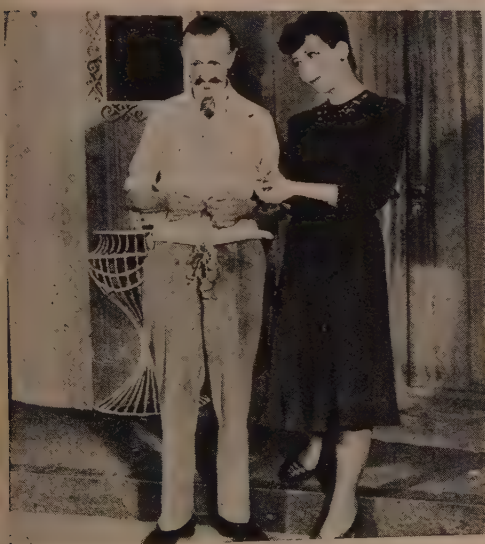
Louche (Ernest Mesiger) reluctantly praises Florence Beaudouin with whom he himself is very much in love, to her vaccinating future husband, Gustave Chamouet (Charles Leslop). The scene is Florence's villa on L'Isle Adam, thirty miles from Paris. (George Desmond is now playing the part of Louche.)



PICTURES

BY

W. DEBENHAM



Florence: When we walk down the aisle together, another triumph will have been won over bourgeois respectability.

Florence (Ellen Pollock) tries to explain to the disconsolate Louche the advantages of her forthcoming marriage to her ninth lover, Gustave.



Gabrielle (Beryl Mason): At my parents' chateau there are two stone lions at the gate.
Florence: How nice for them.

Florence finds her daughter-in-law, for whose sake she is donning the cloak of respectability, very difficult to get on with.

Scenes from Louis Verneuil's amusing light comedy, adapted from the French by Leslie Julian Jones and James Lavall and presented by Albert Desmond in conjunction with James Lavall.



Germaine (Evelyn Barnard): You've convinced me that I adore you.

The bogus baroness convinces the indecisive Gustave that he loves her, to the consternation of Florence and Gabrielle. Also looking on is Commander Pluquette (Stanley Vilven).



(Centre):

Gabrielle: I do not understand your outlook on life.

Gabrielle finds her charmingly unconventional mother-in-law very shocking.

Louche: I've got a little method of my own.

Florence, overcome by a series of crises, faints. In such a situation Louche is more resourceful than her doctor's son, Robert (Dennis Bowen).



Florence: Oh he's only Louche.

Florence does not take seriously Gabrielle's suggestion that she should marry her faithful old adorer Louche, now that it seems her future husband has run away.

(Centre):

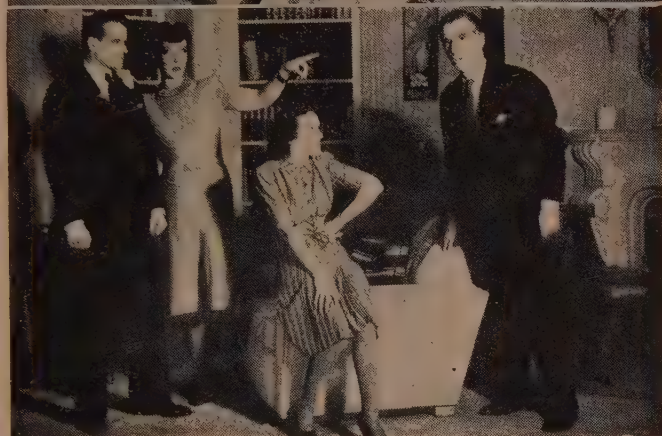
Florence: He's the cause of all the trouble.

Gustave finds his position increasingly uncomfortable as Florence appeals to her sturdy son Robert for sympathy.

(Below):

Florence: Oh, Gustave, I thought I had lost you for ever.

Florence and Gustave are reconciled at last after their series of adventures, and *(below, right)*, with the remark that "marriage is a wonderful thing" the two married couples settle down happily together.



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Amateur Stage

Notes and Topics

SEVERAL groups in London, and no doubt a similar position applies in the Provinces, are in urgent need of men to fill acting parts. Emergencies of sudden call-up, Home Guard duty, transfer on war work, play havoc with production arrangements, and rehearsals are imperilled. Here are two urgent calls for men in the London area. If any male readers of *Theatre World* are interested, will they please apply direct to the following:—

Mr. John Holgate, Room 167, St. Stephen's House, Westminster, S.W.1, telephone, Whitehall 6047, who asks for men who are free and can rehearse in the West End.

Miss I. Saddington, 127, Old Road West, Gravesend, who is secretary of the Pyramid Players in that district.

Some details of the two groups making this request will be a fair indication of amateur work in the London area in the fifth winter of total war.

MAUGHAM'S *The Circle* was produced recently by a combined company of The Taverners and The St. Mildred's Clerks, with Harold Matthews as producer. Performances were given at a military hospital and to audiences which know the previous work of these two companies well at Erith, Plaistow, Bow, and Camberwell.

Both companies are now at work on productions of Shaw; The Taverners, with Harold Hersee as producer, on *Fanny's First Play*, and St. Mildred's Clerks, with Harold Matthews, on *Widowers' Houses*, which has much to say now that is apposite about the housing problem. Performances of these plays will be given under John Holgate who, as Director of Entertainments of the British War Relief Society Allies Wing, has a considerable number of audiences always demanding plays.

Mr. Holgate produces and acts with the Plaistow Little Theatre Players. This company has presented two plays this season, *At Mrs. Beam's* by C. K. Munro, and James R. Gregson's Yorkshire dialect comedy-farce, *The Devil a Saint*. At the first performance of this play the company had the honour of the attendance of the author and

(Continued on page 32)

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The Return of "Job"

by
Audrey Williamson

(Right):

Robert Helpmann as Satan in Ninette de Valois' *Job*, happily now back in the Sadler's Wells repertoire.

PORTRAIT BY ANTHONY.



NINETTE DE VALOIS' achievement as founder and director of what is, in effect, the English National Ballet has seemed to overshadow in some minds her importance as a choreographer. With *Job* and *The Rake's Progress* now both in the Sadler's Wells repertoire it should become apparent even to newcomers to ballet that Miss de Valois' work as choreographer has been of equal significance. She has not merely founded a national ballet school and practising company; she has given to English choreography a new and vital national direction and characteristic. In the history of ballet she must stand as the first great English choreographer, and in the national sense she retains her pre-eminence to-day beside the more Russian-grounded genius of Ashton, the dramatically vibrant but as yet unprolific Helpmann, and the frequently overrated but extremely promising Anthony Tudor, some of whose small ballets produce a curiously Gallic effect of style, but a major work by whom has yet to be seen in England.

Job, the first great ballet to reveal a definite national style, has, therefore historical as well as artistic importance. It is great not only in choreography but also in music and inspiration. Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job, a unique mystical manifestation in English painting, have provided the choreographer with a plastic and spiritual foundation on which, with the help of Gwendoline Raverat's settings and thunder-red drop curtain, she has built a ballet remarkable not only for its quality of

plaint grouping but of mind. *Job* is a spiritual experience; an effect heightened by the grave, ritualistic pattern of the Hebrew dances and the dramatic stylisation of the masked figure of God (confusingly designated in the programme as "Job's Spiritual Self," an ambiguity which could only be necessary in an age as religiously weak-kneed as our own). It is also superb drama, the choreographer having vividly realised the action implicit behind the theological argument and imagery of the Bible story, and created her ballet around the epic theme of Satan's ambition pitched against the power of God. The passion, resignation and terror of the theme are also magnificently reproduced in Vaughan Williams' score, still the finest music yet composed for an English ballet and, as in his new *Symphony in D*, combining a sweet pastoral placidity with richness of orchestral texture. The music has, too, a stabbing hesitancy of barbaric rhythm which Miss de Valois has matched with virile imagination in the dance of Satan, and which Robert Helpmann reflects in the savage strength and rhythmic subtlety of his dancing.

Satan is Miss de Valois' supreme creation, and the dramatic climaxes of the ballet centre in him; in his rebellious demand of God, the withering malediction of his outflung arm marking Job as his prey, his triumphant mounting of the throne of God, his headlong fall in defeat. It is a rôle that demands quite exceptional dramatic and musical powers in the performer. Created by Anton Dolin as a figure of muscular

physical pride, it is only since Robert Helpmann took over the character that it has acquired its full preternatural virulence of body and mind. This is a Prince of Darkness of Miltonic grandeur, who might cry as in *Paradise Lost*, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven!" The very contraction of the back muscles as this Satan kneels before the throne suggests bitter humiliation and defiance, and seated on the throne itself, like a statue by Michaelangelo in green bronze, he has a livid and destructive malevolence. Hazlitt wrote of Kean's Richard III that it "filled every part of the stage," and Helpmann's Satan does, indeed, seem to grow both physically and mentally, and fill the stage with a sense of frustrated power. The almost lay figure of Job requires an actor who can make stillness positive, if it is to have any significance, and this the present performance does not achieve; but the team-work is excellent, David Paltenghi's Elihu catches the Apollo-like brightness and poignancy of "Ye are old, and I am very young," and Celia Franca's ebony and ivory beauty, in a dress like a green flame, makes a centre-piece to the pictures of Hebraic loveliness.

Just how indispensable Helpmann has become to the performance of some English Balléts has been shown by his illness this season, and the shuffling of the repertoire it necessitated. Such chaos would not have occurred if English dancers had received the extensive groundwork in acting and mime that was given to the dancer-artists of the Maryinsky, though Helpmann would have been an exceptional actor-mime in any age. One of the most interesting things to emerge, however, has been the power of a ballet such as *Dante Sonata* to retain much of its moving intensity even without an obvious leader of the forces of evil (Franklin White danced Helpmann's part very competently

at short notice, but with no suggestion of the baleful). Pamela May's return has now given a finer emotional balance to this work and her frenzied pain and resignation match the moving performances of David Paltenghi and Margot Fonteyn. Paltenghi's Comus was intelligently acted, but seemed heavy and brutish after Helpmann's tortuous and lissom elegance; this dancer's lack of "line" was here an obvious drawback, for Helpmann's dancing and choreography are both based on it. It is a pity that the best *danseur* in this company after Helpmann, Alexis Rassinie, has not been more encouraged to develop on the acting side, for his witty touch in *The Prospect Before Us* and some of his mime as Benno and in *The Quest* suggest he may not necessarily be limited to pure virtuosity; and there is a need in the company for a *danseur* beside Helpmann who can act and dance (Gordon Hamilton can do both, but his physique is not that of a first dancer). The influence of such artists as Helpmann and Fonteyn has, however, probably been considerable, and the company does show a trend to produce dancers who can build up a character. One has only to instance such performances as Leslie Edwards' bizarre and fawning Wizard in *The Quest*, seeming to swell in malignant anticipation as he takes on the form of St. George; Margaret Dale's little Page in *Hamlet*, sickened and frightened like a child at the sight of blood; the ill-omened beauty of Celia Franca's Queen in the same ballet, and David Paltenghi's sinister force as the King; Mavis Jackson's appealing performance as the Girl in *The Rake's Progress*, now greatly matured in pity and depth. It is surprising that a ballet such as *Hamlet* can still be performed with only one real weakness in the casting. Comus is less fortunate, and Helpmann's virile choreography for the Brothers has shockingly disintegrated.

There is not space to record more than Joan Sheldon's charmingly saucy performance of the *Promenade* solo, and an outbreak of volumes of Robert Bridges' *Testament of Beauty*, like a rash, among the audience.

R.A.D. PRODUCTION CLUB

The performance of the Royal Academy of Dancing Production Club at the Comedy Theatre on January 2nd was disappointing. Perhaps owing to the fact that Sadler's Wells students did not appear, the dancers generally lacked stagecraft, and the new ballets belonged to the *genre* of revue rather than the ballet theatre. Petipa's *Swan Lake* is a much better test of balletic capabilities, and Pauline Clayden, against some musical discouragement, danced Odette with marked improvement of carriage and line, though her mime rather lacked expression. Daria Luna and Gillian Lynne, a young Ballet Guild dancer with a superb line, were also noticeable.

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Hollywood War Worker

(Continued from page 24)

ing vast fortunes find living just as exasperating as the poorest crowd artist in their pictures. Money has lost its power; it can do nothing to alter food shortage or delay in the supply of commodities; nor can it help to hasten the visit of either plumber or physician when their services are needed in the home. Dining out is expensive and can be decidedly wearisome, often involving lining up, even at the most exclusive hotels and restaurants. The citizen of Los Angeles is, in fact, no better off than the citizen of London.

Despite the fact that she is over 6,000 miles from the nearest battlefield, Una sacrifices every evening of the week to the troops, even after a full and exhausting day at the Studio. Hollywood is well peopled with soldiers, sailors, and airmen of all nations who find themselves in the Film City, either on duty or on leave. Something has to be done to keep them interested and free from boredom, so Una, in common with a number of other stars including Gladys Cooper, Heather Angel, Jill Esmond, Philip Merivale, Louis Borell, Melville Cooper, and Allan Jones, has put her services at their disposal.

James Whale has produced a superb series of one-act plays which are performed every night on the stage of a Hollywood theatre by glittering star casts, giving their services free of charge for the season. Plays by Coward, Wilder, Saroyan and James Parrish adorn the bill, which is changed from time to time as one star leaves and another joins this unique band of famous players. Others collect props, build scenery, and perform gratuitously all the various menial tasks necessary to the public presentation of a play. Members of the Forces attend the performance free of charge, but any surplus seats are sold to the public, who pay five dollars each towards staging the next production and covering incidental expenses such as printing and electricity bills. Cheerfully these stars dedicate every evening of the week to the troops, even though the plays run for as long as nine weeks at a time. Nine successive weeks is often a strain for artists filming by day and acting by night, but the show must go on for the boys, regardless of cost, and no artist has yet failed to keep faith with this cosmopolitan public—nightly guests of the most generous profession in the world.

Sunday may offer rest for a few, but not for Una. In the morning she uses her car to take Catholic members of the Forces from a neighbouring canteen to Mass, and every Sunday afternoon a fresh batch of Jews and Gentiles takes advantage of her standing invitation to tea in the apartment on North Crescent Heights. Officers are never seen at these gatherings. Una

has no prejudice against them, but her first consideration is for the men who lack those social advantages that go hand in hand with a commission. She imagines the ranks are far more likely to be suffering the mental agony of loneliness and homesickness, and so they are uppermost in her mind when she offers real English tea and talk as a pleasant way of passing a Hollywood Sunday afternoon.

Una is a wonderful listener. Apart from getting the unique chance of seeing how an actress lives off-stage, these lads get an opportunity to relax in a genuine home once more. With very little encouragement they soon find their tongues. In no time shabby wallets emerge from tunic pockets and snapshots of mothers, wives, and girl friends are passed across to their hostess, who already seems like a life-long friend.

It is a great experience for them to meet a film star—rather like meeting a character out of a book—but what appeals to them more than anything is the fact that Una is never photographed as she pours their tea and lights their cigarettes. She asks them because she wants to entertain them and not because she wants to crash into the newspapers. They realise that they are being invited for their own

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Hollywood War Worker

(Cont. from previous page)

sakes, and not because a star wishes to use them as a means of reaping personal publicity. Many of these perfect strangers have since written delightful letters of appreciation to their hostess, but what has touched her even more have been letters received from their families in England who have taken the trouble to thank her for the genuine hospitality she has shown their menfolk abroad.

Once the teacups have been cleared away and the ash trays emptied on a Sunday evening, Una steps into her car and drives off to perform the one-act plays again, for they believe in Sunday opening in the Hollywood theatre. This is pretty good going, on considering that when Una first went out to America to play in *Cavalcade* she was detained for a night on Ellis Island where the authorities declared her to be suffering from a leaky heart valve, and feared she might become a public charge in America. In those days they hardly considered her as strong as the traditional horse, though her wartime activities would seemingly belie the fact. She now appears to live without leisure. Her beloved pastimes of sculpture and painting have been renounced until the war is over. Any odd hours that occur are devoted to sewing, knitting and canteen duty, unless she is whirled away to sell war bonds at some public function.

It is not really necessary for a star to live in a bomb-scarred London square to realise that war is raging over three parts of the world. Maybe a sympathetic woman who comforts a homesick sailor 6,000 miles away from his family renders more service to the morale of the Armed Forces than the star at home who "swings" mournful ditties at Camp Concerts thronged with men stationed within an hour or two of their homes. Let us therefore reflect before hastily branding all British stars in America as shirkers of wartime responsibilities. Maybe Una O'Connor and her like could teach us the basic meaning of that hackneyed word—Patriotism.

Amateur Stage (Continued from Page 28)

Mrs. Gregson. When, at the end of the first act, a member of the company came round to say that Mr. and Mrs. Gregson were in the audience repeating the lines with the actors, the company was justifiably terrified, but encouraged to do their very best. Further performances of this play were given in January, and Mr. Gregson, well-known as a dramatist-actor-producer-broadcaster in the North, has promised to visit Plaistow to talk about his experiences. The next two productions will be *Ladies in Retirement* and *The Whiteheaded Boy*.

(Continued in next Column)

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THE Pyramid Players, of Gravesend, Kent, were founded in 1937, and are the only amateur group in the district to carry on during the war. Recent productions were *Square Pegs and Goodness, How Sad*, and the play in rehearsal now for which male cast are required is *Other People's Houses*. It is felt that there may be temporary war visitors in the district who would be glad to join such a group—now is their chance. And this, by the way, includes both sexes, for the Pyramid Players will welcome women as well as men.

BRIGHTON Little Theatre Company finish several performances of *Maugham's Home and Beauty* with one on Sunday, January 30th. Nothing if not versatile, their recent list includes performances of *Dusty Ermine*, *Wild Decembers*, *Charity Begins* and *Too True to be Good*.

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Mondays, February 7, 14, 21 and 28, at 3 p.m.

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In aid of

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For daily play and times, please see—*Daily Telegraph*

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Times of performances should be confirmed by
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